

## **The Fifteen Mile-an-Hour Feeling**

by Dieter Müller

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We are in the midst of the Alps, Lenzer Heide, Switzerland at its best, a beautiful landscape, surprisingly warm and sunny weather and most of the tourists already gone by the end of August. My two friends and I are preparing our racing bikes. My friends are very experienced bikers. For years they've been climbing the mountains and it's only my second trip with them. Some of the most spectacular passroads are waiting for us. We are not only looking for landscapes, we also like to watch ourselves and our bodies under extreme conditions. My friends are involved in Yoga and meditation and I am interested to find out if Focusing helps in extreme body stress. While checking the brakes and the pressure of the tires I am aware that I've been looking forward to this trip for many months.

Our route for today goes up Albula Pass and then up to Bernina Pass, to see the famous glacier there. Then downhill to Italy and back tonight with the nostalgic Glacier Express Railway.

The moment I climb on my bike, I start realizing that my last biking tour in the Alps was a long time ago and I am not quite sure how much my body is in shape this year. I've been training a lot these past weeks and I never had any doubt about my physical condition. On the other hand we have no real mountains at home to train for these long roads up to the summit. Will it really be OK? "A great time for all these thoughts," I hear myself answering.

The signpost says twenty miles up to Albula Pass. I begin very slowly. It's like testing my body very carefully. After three miles of steep road my muscles start hurting. I feel a kind of alarm in my head. "After three miles you are getting exhausted," I hear someone criticizing me; "It might be better to stop; don't torture yourself" (how helpful), "Why the hell are you doing this?" A bewildering inner communication is going on. Someone within me stopped these voices with: "You wanted it and now you've got it!"

I am very anxious about my legs. I try to change the focus, looking for something that's going well. My breathing is good, no problems with that. I am OK. Someone is passing me with his mountain bike and I find myself following him. He isn't supposed to pass me with a mountain bike. My two friends stay behind, keeping their speed. They seem to have found their way to handle the road. After ten miles my body hangs just at the edge between going on and stopping. I find myself making too much effort. Something needs to be done.

I remember my experiences during the times I did marathons. I used Focusing to find my inner strength during running. There used to be three boxes inside my body which I could open one after the other. They were filled with physical power and brought new energy. Unfortunately there are no boxes now! It looks like my body is not ready for felt senses. I wait a minute to feel, what comes when I just keep company with my body.

The picture that comes after a while is a watermill. I sense that it needs to be taken care of, to keep it going round freely with no blocks. That picture helps. My legs are making circles and going around very precisely. To attend to this brings new energy and some lightness in my movements. The mill picture and the movement of my legs really fit together. When I lose the picture after a while I can come back to it. My thoughts are drifting away from my body and I find the time to look around, see the mountains, a small creek next to the street and the emerald green lake down the slope. I feel the fresh air and find myself saying, "Yes, that's why you are doing all this — here it is!" It makes a difference to go up the mountains by car or motorbike or by your body.

Far away I see a hotel; looks like the summit hotel. To see it gives me the idea that we will soon be there and have a rest. There is a need for a good coffee break. Finally we reach the hotel. I ask my friend if we are already up the mountain and he says only four miles to the summit. Four more miles up this road! I should have known. The mountains are always like this; the moment

you think you've reached the summit, you realize that the hardest part is still in front of you. I have been so much fixed on the idea that we did the first pass already that I lose my equilibrium. My friends seem to be better prepared, psychologically. I can't imitate them, though I'd like to. The only thing that keeps me going is my determination not to give up. Two years ago I got off my bike, but the moment I stopped I felt recovered, so I mistrust the idea that stopping is the best thing to do now. It looks like my body is at the end, but after ten endless minutes I learn I can stand this. It feels very exhausting but it isn't getting worse. I have come to the bottom of the valley. This is a very powerful feeling — to know I will stand this. It feels like a second feeling behind the pain and it changes everything. I am getting closer to my friends, so I can see them again and here it is, Albula pass! We have a coffee break.

The view is great and I really succeeded in climbing this road — well done, Dieter! I see quite a lot of bikers up here with happy faces. I am happy too and yet there is still something that doesn't feel OK. In some way this was by the skin of my teeth. I feel that there was no rhythm that brought me forward. Even if my body did its best, looking backward it feels as if I was driving with the brakes on.

We reach St. Moritz and find our way up to Bernina pass. I have the same experience. In some way it works very well; I reach the top of the mountain. My physical condition is great; I never did two of these passroads within one day. But there is still something that isn't going around.

The next day we want to climb Stilvio, a really big deal with bicycles. We need to go up Albula pass and then down to Livigno, and from there up to Stilvio. During the night I don't sleep well. How can I loosen the brakes in my body?

Before we start, I ask my body what it needs to be ready. I get the picture of something light in there, a sort of lightness. And there comes a special feeling of the right speed; the right speed for my body. I call it the "felt speed." I make a decision to try it out this morning — to find the right speed for my body. I am aware of the difference in my attitude. The day before my speed was influenced by fear. It was a defensive way to climb the road, always checking if there's enough power and energy and always fearing that there won't be enough of it. On the other hand I cannot go any speed at all. I decide that it has to do with letting the body find its right speed.

Next morning. Again I start very slowly, I check my legs, my breathing and warm up my muscles and I check the roundness of that mill wheel in my pelvic region. I gather speed until it reaches my inner feeling of the right speed going uphill. The right speed seems to have a number: it turns out to be fifteen miles an hour. This is exactly the speed my body needs to feel the pleasure of movement without being exhausted an hour later. I am surprised, because this is double the speed I could go yesterday. My fear is that I cannot keep it up for such a long way, but this doesn't happen; I feel more and more power to go and I reach Albula pass half an hour earlier than yesterday.

We reach the next pass some hours later. It still works. Even if the road to Stilvio is mostly too steep for me to reach the fifteen miles an hour (to tell the truth, sometimes speed is very very slow up this mountain), it is the knowledge of that feeling. It is there and whenever possible I came back to that speed. I think I have found a new feeling in my body. It's a kind of inner cruise control and I call it the "fifteen mile an hour feeling."

Some people say they can do better Focusing during walking or running. I can imagine that Focusing can work better this way. For me it's not like that. I found it even harder to do Focusing during cycling.

I wanted to use Focusing for better cycling, and that worked more or less. But I found more. I believe I found a whole new entrance to my body. The body obviously has a knowledge about how to move and how fast to move. There is no simple linear relationship such as the faster you move the more exhausted you are. This relationship is much more intricate. To bike slower than the "right" speed might be exhausting too. This is far away from the rather trivial pleasures of winning or succeeding in climbing a mountain (though I do enjoy those pleasures). It is a shift that comes when speed and movement complete the inner "idea" of a right movement. When I sit here at my computer, I still can get a bit of that feeling, though I didn't ride my bike during the

winter season. It is still there. ∂

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